

BEFORE THE
POSTAL RATE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, DC 20268

In the Matter of:

Venice, California 90294 : Docket No: A2012-17
Post Office State ZIP Code

James Smith, for himself and for the
Free Venice Beachhead newspaper, Petitioner(s) :

PARTICIPANT STATEMENT

1. Petitioner(s) are appealing the Postal Service's Final Determination concerning the Venice post office. The Final Determination was posted Sept. 23, 2011.
(date)

2. In accordance with applicable law, 39 U.S.C. § 404(d)(5), the Petitioner(s) request the Postal Regulatory Commission to review the Postal Service's determination on the basis of the record before the Postal Service in the making of the determination.

3. Petitioners: Please set out below the reasons why you believe the Postal Service's Final Determination should be reversed and returned to the Postal Service for further consideration. (See pages of the Instructions for an outline of the kinds of reasons the law requires us to consider.) Please be as specific as possible. Please continue on additional paper if you need more space and attach the additional page(s) to this form.

I, James Smith, am a Venice Postal patron and a box holder. The Free Venice Beachhead also uses a box at the Venice Main Post Office for its main mailing address. I have previously submitted an appeal, dated Oct. 22, 2011. In addition to the points raised in that appeal, I would like to add the following:

1) Either by plan or by benign neglect, the Post Service has taken actions that have caused a decline in patronization of the Venice Main. These include: a. lack of clean-up of the exterior that makes the front of the building dirty and unappealing; b. installation of a Federal Express box that partially blocks the entrance to the post office and that is covered with graffiti; c. according to postal clerks, the Venice Main has, during the past two years been "shorted" on stamps by the Postal Service, making customers less likely to return; d. long lines of patrons have been constant, with only two of five windows open at any one time, causing patrons to leave in disgust. The result of these and other actions by the Postal Service has been to drive away customers even though the Venice Main is the most convenient post office for Venice residents.

2) The Venice Postal Annex, at 15,890 square feet, is considerably smaller than the Venice Main, which is 23,700 Sq. Ft. The final decision of the USPS apparently did not have this information when it asserted that the customer windows, postal boxes and lobby could be accommodated in the smaller building. An on-site inspection or interviews with postal employees would lend themselves to an opposite conclusion.

Closing the Venice Main is bad for both the USPS and the Venice community. For the USPS, it will incur instant animosity from an entire community. In an arts community, nothing is more treasured than a beautiful building and a beautiful mural, especially if they are old. The USPS claims a modest revenue savings of \$135,000 per year, but this does not take into account the extensive modifications that would be necessary, according to postal employees, to make the postal annex suitable for customer service. Including five service windows, hundreds of boxes, a lobby as well as heating and air conditioning could require an extension of the building's exterior. The savings does not include the cost of defending against law suits. The savings does not include any modifications to the Venice Main to put it in sales condition. And the savings would disappear should there be a boycott, either formal or informal, of the building by the residents of Venice.

The sale would be detrimental to the Venice community which would be losing its community's center. The Edward Biberman mural - the only one of his works in a post office - would be viewed by far fewer people if it were not in the post office lobby. In addition to being an outstanding example of 1940s mural art, it instills a sense of pride and belonging to Venetians who are able to view it while conducting their daily tasks. Called the "Story of Venice," it depicts scenes from the history of Venice which are unique to this community. The civic pride which the people of Venice have exhibited for generations must be due in part to repeated meditations on this work of art. The intrinsic value placed on this artwork by Venetians can be better understood when reference is made to beloved paintings, murals, sculptures and buildings in other cities and towns. It is hard to imagine a safer and more well-trafficked venue for the mural than within the Venice Main Post Office. The Post Office, itself, sits on a small hill overlooking the Venice circle - which itself is historic as the site of the former canal lagoon - and is an imposing building. It conveys a solidity and confidence in the postal service in a manner that few other building do. It has stood in regal splendor on this site since 1939. Few living residents can remember when it was not part of their community. It is obviously of historical value, but will be unprotected if sold by the USPS.

It would seem that the USPS did not consider any alternatives to selling the Venice Main. It could have realized millions of dollars more revenue by selling the carrier annex, which although a barn of a building sits on a full triangular block in a residential district. It could have made more annual revenue by leasing unused parts of the Venice Main to commercial interests, which would have access to the building through other entrances. In this way, the USPS would not lose control of this valuable asset, while turning it into a "cash cow" in the meantime. Instead, the USPS choose the least viable option and the one that would yield the least revenue.

The role of the USPS, and its predecessor Department of the Post Office, has long been to help build communities. Since the nation's founding, and even before, the establishment of a post office has been the signal for a community to begin to develop. Today in a globalized world, home towns (communities) are more important than ever for the physical and psychological well-being of the nation's citizens. The definition of a community still includes a post office as one of the most important elements. A decision to take away our Venice Main Post Office would be a blow to our sense of community. It would be a blow, from which our community might never recover.

People and institutions often make bad decisions. The real damage is done when there is no recognition and rectification. An arrogant civil servant will continue on the wrong course in spite of the warnings of many voices. But an enlightened civil servant will take heed of contrary opinions, investigate, and make necessary changes. The Venice Main Post Office should be preserved by the USPS as the treasure it is.



James R Smith

Dec. 8, 2011